

# TELEVISION AND GROWING UP:

# THE IMPACT OF TELEVISED VIOLENCE

## REPORT TO THE SURGEON GENERAL UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

#### FROM THE

# SURGEON GENERAL'S SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TELEVISION AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

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### Letter of Transmittal

December 31, 1971

Dr. Jesse L. Steinfeld Surgeon General Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Dr. Steinfeld:

We are pleased to transmit our report on the research available in our study of television and social behavior.

We have been careful to keep in mind that this committee was established as a scientific body. Our major concern has been to assess the research carefully and come to conclusions justified by the data.

As the report shows, this has been a very complex issue, for which there are no simple answers. We trust that this report will help to advance the understanding of these complexities.

Respectfully submitted.

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#### Foreword

This report is the result of over two years of effort by a distinguished committee of behavioral scientists. Their task has been difficult. The impact of televised violence on the viewer, as a reading of the report will show, is embedded in a complicated set of related variables.

The conscientious effort by the committee to avoid an oversimplification of the problem has produced a document which may seem, at times, too technical. However, I believe that this report and the five volumes of research reports, which serve as a basis for the committee conclusions, make a major contribution to an understanding of the role of television in influencing the social behavior of children and young people.

The conclusions reached by the committee are carefully worded and merit the serious attention of all persons and groups concerned about the effects of viewing television. As the committee notes, these conclusions are based on substantially more knowledge than was available when the committee began its deliberations. But the research still leaves many questions unanswered. Without detracting from the importance of its conclusions, the committee specifies some of these unanswered questions and urges that they be addressed in the future.

This report will undoubtedly be scrutinized carefully by people who will be looking for support for their own prior point of view. Individuals with strong convictions on either side of the question about the effects of televised violence may not be satisfied. What these individuals will fail to recognize is that this set of conclusions, for the first time in this field of inquiry, sets a solid and extensive base of evidence in an appropriate perspective. In that sense, the report and the research on which it is based represent a major contribution.

The committee is to be congratulated for the work it has done. The successful conclusion of the task is even more significant because of the explicit consensus among so broadly representative a group of scientists. I wish to commend the committee, the researchers, and the staff for a job well done.

Jesse L. Steinfeld, M.D.

Surgeon General

#### **PREFACE**

All the available statistics confirm the pervasive role television plays in the United States, if not throughout the world. More people own television sets and more people watch television than make use of any other single mode of mass communication.

It is no wonder then that television is the subject of much attention, both directly as it serves its purpose and indirectly as a source of concern to examine how well it serves its purpose. All manner of inquiry about the input of television on the lives of the American public has been and is being made. The issues about public television, cable television, and the role of television in election campaigns are all in the news today.

The question of violence on television has been one issue that was raised almost immediately after television became a major contender for the leisure time and attention of the public. There have been a number of prior public examinations of this issue, and a number of statements and conclusions have been made.

The committee has taken into account these earlier studies in reaching its own conclusions. We have also had the benefit of an extensive body of new data which we have carefully examined.

A great deal of work is reflected in the pages of this report and in the concurrently published five volumes of technical reports, which have served as the major source of new information. We believe this work makes a major contribution to this area of scientific inquiry, and we wish here to acknowledge our indebtedness to the researchers and staff who brought that research to a successful conclusion.

Our task has not been easy. We have tried to come to as carefully objective a conclusion as the data warranted. We suspect the debate will not end here. We are dealing with a complex and changing set of phenomena. Reassessment is inevitable as new evidence becomes available and as changes occur in what television presents and how it is presented.

Our report consists of two parts: a Summary of Findings and Conclusions and a detailed report.

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